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A Model for Systemwide Reform: The Centennial BOCES Title VII Program

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Centennial BOCES and LEP Students

The Centennial BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services), located in north central Colorado about 50 miles from Denver, provides educational services to participating school districts, and functions as the local education agency (LEA) for those services. Since 1996, the Centennial BOCES has been administering a Systemwide Title VII Bilingual Program, serving students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who are enrolled in kindergarten through grade twelve. Funding for the implementation of Systemwide Title VII grants is allocated by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), U.S. Department of Education, to support the restructuring and reform goals of schools with significant populations of LEP students.

There are approximately 2,500 LEP students served by the Centennial BOCES Systemwide grant within five school districts: Gilcrest (RE-1), Eaton (RE-2), Johnstown-Milliken (RE-5J), Platte Valley (RE-7), and Ault-Highland (RE-9). Close to ninety percent of these students (approximately 2,200) have low to average English language proficiency, scoring between 1 to 3 on the Woodcock-Muñoz assessment instrument. All are native speakers of Spanish.

The Centennial BOCES has had extensive experience leveraging resources to better serve students who are learning English, while also building program capacity through creative programs and practices. Prior to the Systemwide Title VII Bilingual Program, the Centennial BOCES was the recipient of a Title VII Enhancement Grant. This project, *Critical Thinking Connections*, served LEP students in the five participating school districts for three years (1994-97). Currently, these districts receive support for their LEP students not only from the Systemwide grant, but also from state-funded migrant education and technology programs such as:

1. Networks for Technology Learning Communities (Net-TLC)—a Colorado Goals 2000 CASSI Grant, funded in 1997; and
2. Networks for Technology Learning Communities Plus (Net-TLC+)—a Colorado State Technology Literacy Challenge Fund Grant, funded in 1998.

Key to their capacity building has been the development of partnerships across and within school districts, with universities, with state and Federal government, with business and industry, and with parents and community members. Local business partner *Dream Team Technologies*, for example, has provided discounted technical support and web site development, and works with high school students in a mentorship/service learning program. Universities and colleges in the area have discounted tuition fees to help instructional staff achieve bilingual/ESL endorsement. Bilingual students with computer literacy provide language and technical support to teachers, administrators, parents and peers. All school staff receive training in effective and practical approaches for supporting the academic success of English language learners.

Project Goals

The overall goal of the Title VII Systemwide project in Colorado is to help schools restructure and enhance existing activities that will support a comprehensive language development and academic program for LEP students. The design of the project centers on five more specific goals, listed below.

Goal 1 Design and implement a quality bilingual education program that addresses content and performance standards and assessments to meet the linguistic and academic needs of all students in the project.

Goal 2 Restructure staff, student, and parent time to maximize opportunities for creative scheduling and activities to support increased student achievement.

Goal 3 Provide continual staff development and college credit to all project staff to enable them to effectively meet the needs of LEP students.

Goal 4 Develop and implement an ongoing parent involvement program of activities that considers the parent in the role of learner, problem-solver, teacher of their children, and advocate for the bilingual education of their children.

Goal 5 Coordinate and collaborate with partners in schools, businesses, and the community in order to maximize resources to serve LEP students through the bilingual program.

Project Description

Focusing on staff quality is a prime component of the Systemwide project's approach to achieving each of its goals. Project staff hold bilingual/ESL endorsement, and have expertise in best methods and practices to help LEP students become fully English proficient. All school staff receive training in—and time to collaborate on—ways to improve the academic success of their English language learners.

The project centers its resources on those students with the lowest levels of English language proficiency—students at levels 1, 2 or 3 on the Woodcock-Muñoz. The approximately 2,200 students who fit this category are enrolled in sheltered instruction a part of each day, and mainstreamed the rest. How much sheltered instruction is provided depends on both proficiency level and individual need. Level 1 students (monolingual Spanish speakers) receive as much as 90 minutes of sheltered instruction a day. Level 3 students may attend sheltered classes for as little as 35 minutes a day. A few high Level 3 students and all Level 4 students are fully mainstreamed, with language support as needed.

The student-centered curriculum and instructional materials used in the Systemwide project reflect the philosophy that it is necessary to forge a strong connection between the core curriculum and the ESL/bilingual curriculum. The projects' constructivist approach allows students to learn language in authentic situations, thereby developing lasting, meaningful language that is aligned with cognitive development. Project strategies include:

- *Total Physical Response (TPR)* based on James Asher's theories of second language acquisition in which kinesthetic activities reinforce auditory and visual cues;
- *Primary language* support to help English language learners become proficient in their home language and quickly learn academic subject material by utilizing the language they know best;
- *Whole language* in which written and verbal self-expression involve multi-sensory interaction among English language learners, their peers, and their teacher; and
- *Cooperative learning* in which students learning English gain confidence through working cooperatively with peers.

Project Results

Evaluation Findings

The impact of the project has been documented in three annual evaluation reports (1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98) conducted by META Associates, an external evaluator. Evaluation methods included focus groups, questionnaires and surveys, structured interviews, records review, contact logs and monthly reports, electronic journals, and Professional Development Plans (PDPs). Findings from the evaluation indicate that students are learning English (measured on the Woodcock-Muñoz in English and Spanish, and Snapshot assessments) while achieving to high standards. In addition, time for learning has been restructured, parents are more involved in their children's education, and collaboration is occurring with other Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) programs, and among schools and partners. Additional accomplishments are highlighted below.

- Almost 2,000 LEP students (duplicated count) in kindergarten through grade 12 received Title VII services during the first three years of the project. Students had greater access to computers, the Internet, and email; they put problem-solving skills to use and were able to access information for learning.
- All Title VII teachers are connected and use technology on a daily basis.
- A web site was used to document progress toward improving skills in professional development and for obtaining resources for designing lessons. Over the past eight months, teachers and coaches made approximately 5,500 visits to the home page—nearly 100 visits each.

The project web site (<http://www.net-tlc.org>) has become instrumental for connecting Title VII staff to mentors, peers, and educators throughout the nation. Threaded discussions have occurred on a continual basis since the web site's inception, with the talk focused on such topics as:

Technology: Internet pen pals, web sites, troubleshooting, hardware, software, telementoring

Standards: Curriculum development, assessments, explorations in math and science, developing content curriculum

L1 and L2: Foreign language, Spanish on the Internet, dual language instruction

Teaching and learning: Hampton-Brown curriculum, Mexican American history and culture, secondary education, Title I, test-taking skills, ESL paraprofessionals, famous Hispanics

- Twenty-two coaches served as online mentors working with 33 project teachers to meet goals specified in Professional Development Plans.
- A cohort of 19 Title VII and cooperating content area/classroom staff completed three years of graduate courses leading to a Master's degree.
- Title VII and cooperating staff have participated in workshops and activities designed to improve their capacity to meet the needs of LEP students.
- Parents have become involved in the project and in their children's education by participating in parent activities and serving on the Title VII Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Partnerships with parents have resulted in increased student participation in school.
- A Leadership Council serving as a systemwide improvement steering team consisting of 22 educators meets quarterly to discuss the projects and offer resources to support student learning and achievement.
- Collaborative partnerships have enhanced the project in a number of ways—offering discounts on teacher coursework tuition, as well as other resources, materials, and services.

Staff Reports

Interviews with school staff affirm the positive effect that the Title VII Systemwide Bilingual Program has had on students, resources, and the overall school climate. Below are just a few of their comments.

In the past, the library has had very few resources available about Hispanic people or issues. Language, culture, people, and the Internet have given my students a link to the Hispanic world.

Introducing the Internet to students gives them a new way to find information. My weekly bilingual newsletter has been successful at helping develop positive rapport with parents. Students are more independent in their work and assume more responsibility for their work. My focus is changing from being the teacher to being more of a facilitator.

Small class sizes enable us to address individual student needs utilizing real-life experiences to enhance learning (i.e., writing activities from personal experiences, cultural awareness, study of Mexican history).

Students are using the Internet to research content area projects. They show an excitement for learning.

As a new principal, the most important thing is to build "community" and not allow anyone to

feel isolated. That's what this project has allowed—a collaborative community that is powerful and viewed as a network of professionals.

We are using technology for communication . . . using an online calendar of activities, due dates, and upcoming events. The email features have been useful for communication in English and in Spanish.

Staff also point to a number of student success stories representative of the effectiveness of the programs and services that work in collaboration with the Centennial BOCES Systemwide Title VII Bilingual Program.

I have a student who is in ESL and special education and does not like to read and write. I have gotten him interested through the Internet. He has joined a web site called NET-PALS that has kids his age from all over the world. He can read the description and write back to them. He has even entered his own description and received his own messages. It is exciting to see him look forward to reading and writing although these are both areas that he struggles with.

"Ana" returned to our school after attending schools in Mexico for the first half of the school year. Ana is a very dedicated student, she works hard. She always wants to go the extra mile. She was encouraged to help her younger brother and sister. I supplied her with ideas and materials. At conference time in February, Ana's mother shared information about her enthusiasm for studying and helping her siblings. When we were studying and learning about fables in a literature unit, students were encouraged to take the book home and read a few fables over the weekend. Ana returned to school on Monday with a list of 55 fables she read.

"María" is a fourth grader who scored a four on the Woodcock-Muñoz. She will be exited from the Title VII program at the end of this school year. María is a very good student and a willing helper. She is a very pleasant person to work with. She had a speaking part in the Spring Musical Performance. The video of this is evidence of her talent and capability. She has enjoyed helping me with the younger students in the role of a peer tutor for this last month of school as she liked to help others. I have recommended and encouraged María to take part in a Summer Program offered through the History Department at UNC in conjunction with the Salvation Army. María will be an excellent representative of our school and of our ESL students. I hope that María will receive this scholarship and be awarded the opportunity to participate in this wonderful learning opportunity.

"Carlos" entered school in the fall of 1997 and was placed into a 5th grade classroom. Records were incomplete so we assumed that Carlos did not attend school regularly in Mexico. He did attend schools in the Fort Morgan area prior to his return to Mexico. Carlos has worked hard this school year. He reads and writes in Spanish. He is transitioning well and is able to read and write in English. His English reading and writing skills are below grade level but he has made tremendous progress. His Woodcock-Muñoz scores increased in all assessed areas. He improved an equivalent of one year in the area of reading and writing. In May, the students were given the assignment of researching and reporting on a country. Carlos researched and gave an oral report about Germany. He read his report to a whole class of fourth graders and his fifth grade peer group.

Three years ago, "José" came to our school as a monolingual Spanish-speaking migrant

farmworker from Jalisco, Mexico. He was born in California but his family went to Mexico the next year where they stayed for thirteen years. As a freshman, José was placed part time in ESL with the remainder of his day in the general classroom. Gradually, his time in the regular curriculum areas was increased and ESL services decreased to the point that, as a senior, he is on consult basis and adaptations and modifications are no longer necessary. He is currently enrolled in college research and chemistry. Through Title VII, José's teachers received information that helped them communicate more effectively with him and other students in the same situations. Teachers were given suggestions for materials that were more culturally sensitive. José received additional instruction in background information and content being addressed in the regular program, which made understanding and learning easier.

"Marta" was a first grader at my school. She entered school as a monolingual Spanish speaker. In September she was tested and scored a 1-2 on the Woodcock-Muñoz. She received Title VII services in the general classroom with ESL support for one hour and 45 minutes a day. Although Marta had some health concerns, she was able to make terrific strides in her English language skills. She was retested and scored a 2-3 on the Broad English subtest, and a 3-4 on the Reading-Writing subtests. Marta checked-out many books in Spanish and read them at home.

"Evelyn" entered my school in the fall of 1996 as a monolingual Spanish kindergarten student. She was provided with ESL instruction for 45 minutes a day. Her pre-test score was 1-2 and her post-test score was 2-3. She made tremendous growth and is currently in first grade and continues to do well. Her kindergarten teacher stated: "Evelyn has made a lot of progress with her English acquisition. She is a hard worker and tries to do her best each day." She receives help at home and her mom has signed up to be a room mother for her first grade class.

"Frank" is a third grader attending my school. Last year he received 45 minutes of Title VII instruction each day. His pre-test score was Level 1 and his post-test score was a Level 2. Frank serves as a classroom helper during cooperative learning situations to help build his self-confidence. Frank is confident in the Title VII classroom and the children in the lower grades often look to him for help. His family has recently moved out of the area but Frank will continue to attend my school. His mother and father attend conferences and help him at home. Frank reads in Spanish and is continuing to work hard to be bilingual.

"Josie" came to our school in March of 1997 as a second grader. Kindergarten was spent in a bilingual school in El Paso, Texas and first grade and part of second grade was spent in another school district in Colorado. When she came to us, she was struggling in English and tested even lower in Spanish and she was not reading in either language. During April and May, her teacher and I worked with her in Spanish beginning with the alphabet and initial consonant sounds. We hoped to build her capacity in her native Spanish and then use those skills to support learning in English. Josie was diagnosed with a learning disability but is now reading in Spanish, has phonetic skills, context recognition, and fair comprehension. The Title VII Program is now supporting the IEP created by the special education department. I believe that the Title VII Program has been very instrumental in the reading success Josie is now having.

"Manuel" came to our school during second grade. He tested at Level 1 on the Woodcock-Muñoz in English. During the first year of attendance, Manuel received instruction in Spanish

reading and spelling and ESL from his teacher and myself. At that time, he indicated that he did not want to learn English and his attitude was reflected in his spring post-test score as he showed no gain. During the first part of third grade, Manuel continued the same type of instruction, with the addition of English reading and spelling. About mid-year, Manuel's attitude about English changed and with this change came a great increase in English ability. There was a two-level increase from pre- to post-test (from Level 1 to Level 3). Manuel began to participate in general classroom activities as well as lessons in the Title VII class. During his current fourth grade year, Manuel is reading, writing, spelling, and doing many of his classroom activities in both languages. Manuel now shows a great interest in learning English and a great determination to do so. His teacher and I believe that the bilingual/ESL support Manuel received played a great part in his recent academic success.

Conclusion

Overall, the Title VII Systemwide project has been successful in its efforts to implement change and improvement. LEP students who participated in the project demonstrated gains in English language proficiency, schools utilized bilingual/multicultural curriculum and supplementary materials, collaborative partnerships provided additional student resources, and staff were offered high quality programs for professional development and growth.

Comprehensive systemwide reform efforts take time. While there has been substantial progress toward reaching the project's overarching goal of restructuring resources and activities to support the academic success of LEP students, more is always needed. In its efforts to enhance the educational future of its LEP students, the Centennial BOCES will continue to identify and develop supportive partnerships with school and community members, to assess the changing needs of its LEP population, and to design and implement innovative and effective programs for meeting those needs.

About the Author

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